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ABSTRACT

By the turn of the 20th century, many wealthy families, including the Vanderbilts, had palatial houses along the Hudson River, between New York City and Albany (New York). In 1895, Frederick Vanderbilt, grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, built his country estate overlooking the Hudson River in Hyde Park (New York). With more than 600 acres of landscaped property and a palatial Beaux Arts mansion, the estate came to symbolize the enormous wealth accumulated by a privileged few during the Gilded Age. This lesson plan is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file for the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site and other source materials. The lesson can be used in U.S. history, social studies, and geography courses in units on the Gilded Age or the nation's industrial and economic growth. The teacher materials section provides general information, gives educational objectives for students, discusses visiting the site, lists supplementary resources, and describes how to use the lesson plans. The student materials section includes: "Getting Started"; "Photograph Analysis Worksheet"; "Setting the Stage"; "Locating the Site" (Maps: New York State and surrounding region, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site); "Determining the Facts" (Readings: Vanderbilt Family Beginnings, Vanderbilts' Hyde Park Mansion, Vanderbilts as Philanthropists); "Visual Evidence" (Photos: six photos with various views of the Vanderbilt mansion); and "Putting It All Together" (Activities: How the Other Half Lived, Researching Personalities from the Gilded Age, Philanthropy in the Local Community). (BT)

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Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site: Monument to the Gilded Age. Teaching with Historic Places.

Margaret Laffin
Fay Metcalf, Editor

National Park Service (Dept. of Interior), Washington, DC. Cultural Resources Programs.

SO 032 359

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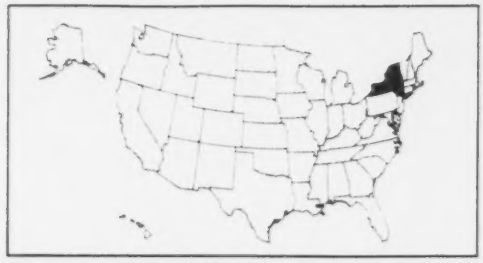
Teaching with Historic Places

Lesson Plan Series



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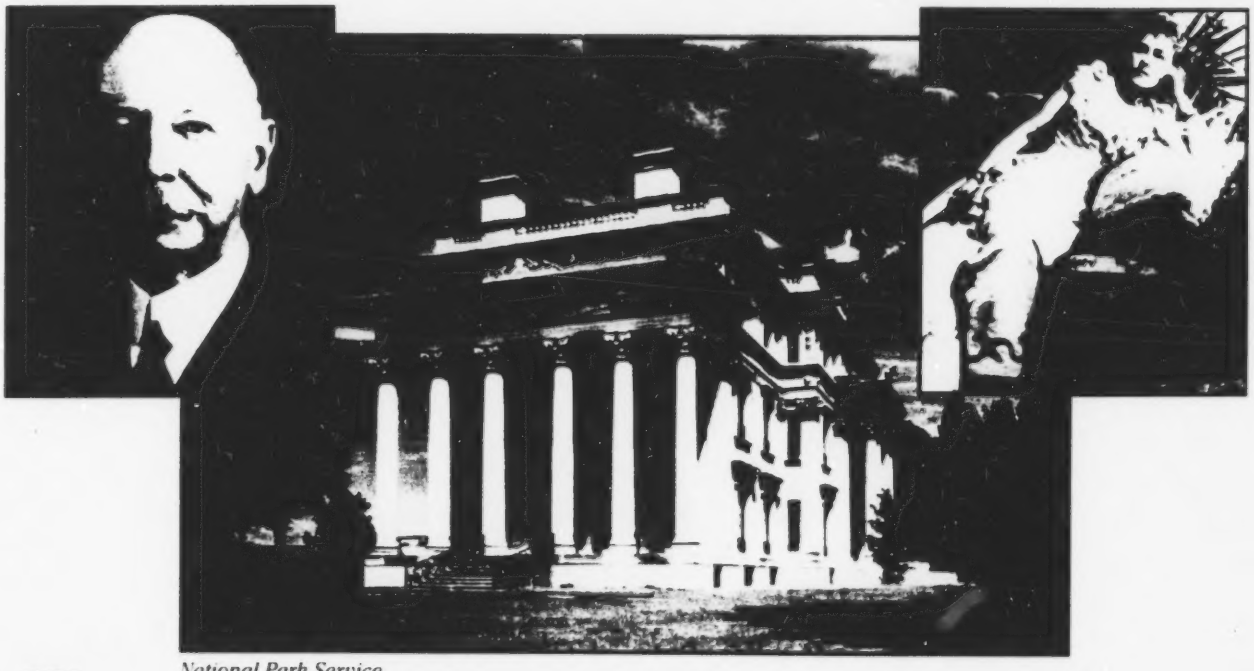
Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site: Monument to the Gilded Age



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With spectacular views of the Hudson River as well as the Catskill and Shawangunk Mountains, the Hudson River valley has much to offer both residents and visitors. By the turn of the 20th century, many wealthy families, including the Vanderbilts, had built palatial houses along the Hudson, between New York City and Albany. The Hudson River held special significance for the Vanderbilts. In the early 1800s, Cornelius "Commodore" Vanderbilt laid the foundation for the Vanderbilt fortune when he began a ferry service between Staten Island and Manhattan. Later, the family's New York Central Railroad ran along the Hudson. In 1895, Frederick Vanderbilt, grandson of the Commodore, built his country estate overlooking the river in Hyde Park, New York. With more than 600 acres of landscaped property and a palatial Beaux-Arts mansion, the Hyde Park estate came to symbolize the enormous wealth accumulated by a privileged few during the Gilded Age. Today, the Vanderbilts' Hyde Park home is preserved as Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site.

Featuring Reproducible Maps, Readings, and Photographs to Enrich U.S. History, Social Studies, and Geography Units on the Gilded Age and 19th-Century Economic Growth.

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About This Lesson Plan

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file for the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site and other source materials. Materials on pages 1-16 are designed to be removed and duplicated for students. (See back page for more instructions.) *Vanderbilt Mansion* was written by Margaret Laffin, Interpretive Park Ranger at Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Site. The lesson was edited by Fay Metcalf, education consultant, and the Teaching with Historic Places staff. For information on other TwHP lessons, visit the program's Web site at www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp.

Where the lesson fits into the curriculum

Topics: The lesson could be used in U.S. history, social studies, and geography courses in units on the Gilded Age or America's industrial and economic growth. *Vanderbilt Mansion* will help students understand the possibilities for wealth in an age before income taxes and government regulation of business and industry. The lesson focuses on the Vanderbilt family and their rise to become one of the wealthiest families in America.

Time period: 1865-1900.

Objectives for students

- To define the Gilded Age and describe the factors that permitted the Vanderbilts and other families to amass huge fortunes.
- To examine the lifestyle associated with the wealthy elite of the Gilded Age.
- To consider the influence the Vanderbilt family had on the Hudson valley region.
- To describe and discuss Frederick and Louise Vanderbilt's philanthropic efforts.
- To conduct research on important people in their community during the Gilded Age.
- To consider how their community benefits from philanthropic activities.

Visiting the site

Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, administered by the National Park Service, is located on Route 9 in the town of Hyde Park, New York. For more information, contact the Superintendent, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Site, 519 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park, New York 12538, or visit the park's Web site at www.nps.gov/vama.

Supplementary resources

Students (or educators) wishing to learn more about the Vanderbilt family may want to read: William A. Croffut, *The Vanderbilts and the Story of Their Fortune* (Salem, N.H.: Ayer Company, 1985); John Foreman and Robbe Pierce Stimson, *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age: Architectural Aspirations, 1879-1901* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); and Arthur Vanderbilt II, *Fortune's Children* (New York: Morrow, 1989).

(continued on inside back cover)

Getting Started

For what purpose do you think this structure was built?
When might it have been constructed?

Photograph Analysis Worksheet

Step 1

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

Step 3

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photograph was taken--can you gather from the photograph?

Step 4

How would you revise your first description of the photograph using the information noted in steps 2 and 3?

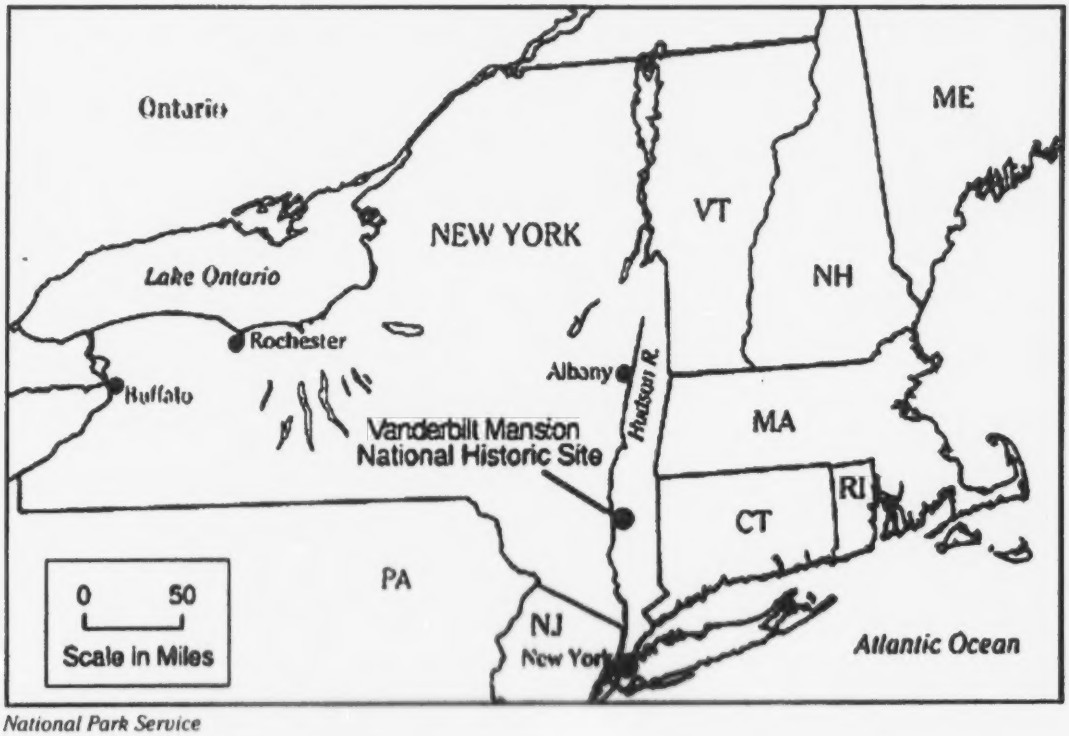
Step 5

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?

Locating the Site

Map 1: New York State and surrounding region.

In 1895, Frederick Vanderbilt (grandson of the Commodore) and his wife Louise purchased a 600-acre estate in Hyde Park, New York, for use during the spring and fall social seasons and an occasional winter weekend. When the existing house on the property proved unsound, the Vanderbilts demolished it and constructed a new house on the same spot, high on a hill along the banks of the Hudson River. Aside from its stunning views of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains, the Hyde Park estate was well-known in the area for the beauty of its designed landscape. Previous owners had developed the site into a horticultural showplace. The variety of trees and plants on the property appealed to Frederick Vanderbilt's love of nature. The Vanderbilts' neighbors included prominent families like the Astors and the Roosevelts.



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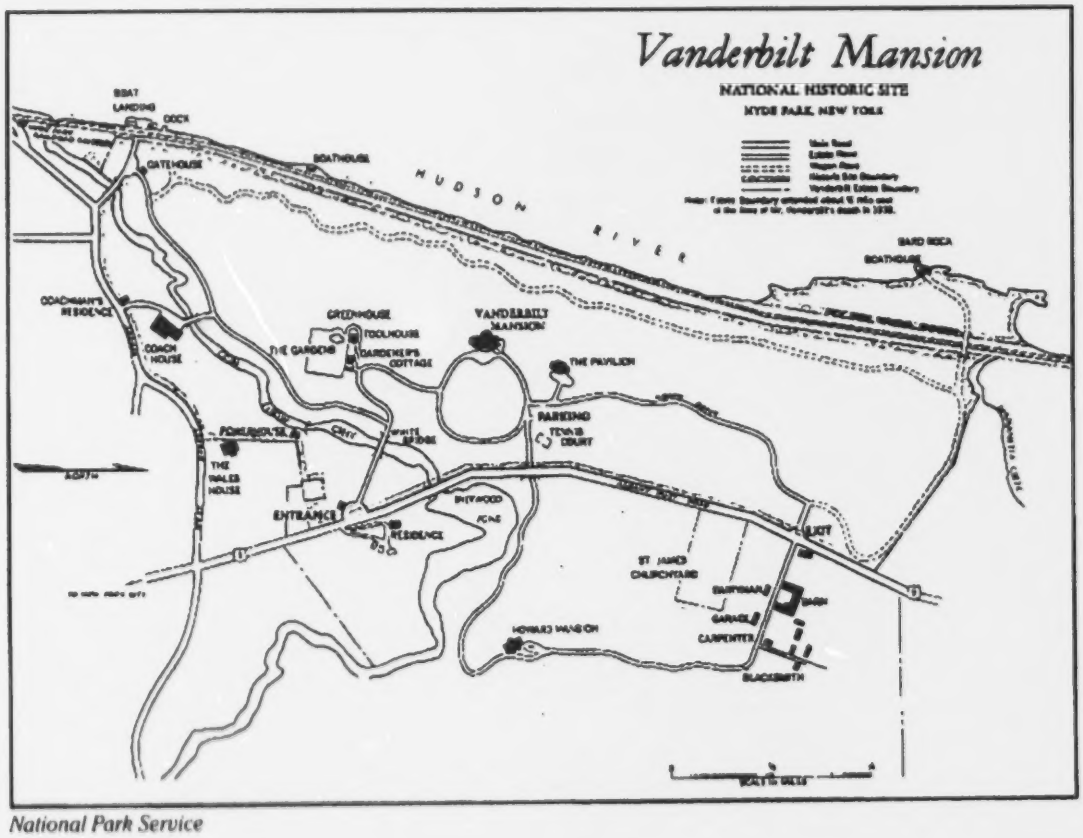
Questions for Map 1

1. Why do you think so many wealthy families chose to build houses along the Hudson River between New York City and Albany?
2. Use the map scale to measure the approximate distance between Hyde Park and New York City. Why might Frederick Vanderbilt have wanted his "country retreat" in this region?

Locating the Site

Map 2: Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site.

Like many wealthy men of his time, Frederick Vanderbilt considered himself a sort of gentleman farmer. His Hyde Park estate included more than 600 acres. On the 474 acres across Albany Post Road, he cultivated flowers and produce and raised livestock. On about 125 acres of the land between Albany Post Road and the Hudson River, Vanderbilt established bridle trails that wound through trees and shrubbery. He restored the Italian gardens that an earlier owner had planted, and he landscaped most of the rest of his land to look like an English country park. The Italian Gardens alone consisted of a potting shed, cherry walk, rose garden, reflecting pool, pergola, gardener's cottage, and greenhouses for palms, roses, carnations, and orchids.



National Park Service

Questions for Map 2

1. Study Map 2 and comment on the scope of the estate. How many structures besides the mansion do you see on the map? Can you figure out the function of each?
2. What forms of transportation could the Vanderbilts and their guests use to reach the estate?

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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: The Vanderbilt Family Beginnings

The Vanderbilts, a family of Dutch farmers, emigrated to America sometime before 1685. They settled in New York, the colony originally known as New Netherland. Not much is known about the early history of the Vanderbilts in America. They did not stand out in New York society until the fourth generation, when in 1810, 16-year-old Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) began to accumulate what would become the largest family fortune America had ever known.

With $100 borrowed from his parents, Cornelius Vanderbilt purchased a periauger (a flat-bottomed sailing barge) and began a ferry service between Staten Island and Manhattan. He repaid the hundred dollars one year later. By then he had earned a profit of $1,000. Eventually, his ferry service became known as the Staten Island Ferry, which is still in operation today. Young Cornelius then signed on as an apprentice on a variety of ships–sailing ships, steamships, and transatlantic cargo carriers–so he could learn all aspects of the seagoing industry. By the age of 50, he had reached millionaire status and had become known by the nickname "Commodore." According to one of his descendants, Vanderbilt's "toughness and use of profanity" earned him the nickname. He did not have many friends, and he treated his enemies harshly. For example, when he believed a former business associate cheated him, he reportedly claimed, "I won't sue you, for the law is too slow. I will ruin you."[1] He then proceeded to do just that.

At the age of 70, Vanderbilt sold his shipping empire and started buying up small, sometimes money-losing, railroads and turning them into profitable ventures. Among other railroad lines, Vanderbilt owned the New York Central, which grew into the nation's biggest business by the 1870s. The hub of this network, which he expanded throughout the Northeast and to Chicago, was Grand Central Station in Manhattan. At the time of his death in 1877, the Commodore was worth $105 million, a larger sum than in the United States Treasury at the time. Wanting to leave his fortune intact, Commodore Vanderbilt left the bulk of his money to the oldest of his 13 children, William Henry. Although William Henry Vanderbilt (1821-1885) lived only eight years after his father's death, he managed to double the family fortune to $210 million, the equivalent in today's currency of more than $3 billion. He was the richest man in the world at the time of his death. Such a huge fortune could be amassed during this period, in part, because income tax and government regulation of business and industry did not yet exist.

William Henry divided his fortune among his four sons and four daughters, but not in equal amounts. This third generation of wealthy Vanderbilts elevated spending money to an art and came to epitomize American high society. Cornelius II and William Kissam, the two oldest boys who had been running the New York Central Railroad system since their father's retirement in 1883, received $80 million and $60 million respectively. Frederick William (1856-1938), the third son and sixth child, received $10 million. At the time of his father's death, Frederick already served as the director of several railroads. Continuing in his grandfather's and father's footsteps, he wisely invested in railroads, coal, oil, steel, and tobacco. Worth $78 million when he died at the age of 82, Frederick accumulated more money than all his siblings combined. Less than half of his fortune remained, however, after paying estate taxes to the federal and state governments. Even so, he left such an enormous amount of money that ordinary people of the time could scarcely imagine what it would be like to be so rich.

Questions for Reading 1

1. How did Cornelius "Commodore" Vanderbilt make his fortune?
2. Why do you think he chose to sell a successful shipping empire and begin a new career in railroads?
3. Why did the Commodore leave most of his fortune to one son?
4. What factors helped some individuals to amass huge fortunes during the Gilded Age?
5. Why did Frederick Vanderbilt inherit much less money than his brothers, Cornelius II and William Kissam?

Reading 1 was adapted from Bronwyn Krog, "Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site" (Dutchess County, New York) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1979; the National Park Service visitor brochure for Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site; and John Foreman and Robbe Pierce Stimson, The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age: Architectural Aspirations, 1879-1901*(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).*

[1] William A. Croffut, *The Vanderbilts and the Story of Their Fortune* (Salem, N. H.: Ayer Company, 1985), 49.

Determining the Facts

Reading 2: The Vanderbilts' Hyde Park Mansion

During the Gilded Age, upperclass New York families typically owned houses in Manhattan and Newport, Rhode Island, as well as a "country retreat" not far from New York City. Every one of William Henry Vanderbilt's eight children eventually owned a mansion on New York's Fifth Avenue in addition to several other houses in the country or by the sea. Aside from their mansion in Hyde Park, New York, Frederick Vanderbilt and his wife Louise owned a townhouse in New York City for use during the winter theater season; a mansion on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean in Newport, Rhode Island, for use during the summer season; another summer home in Bar Harbor, Maine; and a "Japanese Camp" in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. Although called "camps," mountain homes built by wealthy families in the Adirondacks allowed them to commune with nature in a setting that provided all the comforts and conveniences of their other mansions.

Frederick and Louise commissioned the prestigious architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to design their estate at Hyde Park. Construction began in 1896 and reached completion 26 months later in 1898, at a cost of $660,000; with furnishings included, the cost rose to $2,250,000. Norcross Brothers, the largest construction firm in the country, brought in craftsmen from all over the world to work on the mansion. Italian craftsman cut and carved Italian marble on the site. German craftsmen executed the plaster and stone work on the interior of the building and hand carved the Indiana limestone on the exterior of the building. Using exotic woods such as Russian walnut and Santo Domingo mahogany, Swiss craftsmen carved elaborate walls and ceilings.

Stanford White, a partner of McKim, Mead and White, influenced the interior design of the house from the start. For example, he possessed a European carved wooden ceiling that he wished to put in the Vanderbilt's dining room. The size of that ceiling determined the shape and size of the room. White collected the ceiling and other such treasures on his frequent buying trips to Europe. He knew his wealthy clients would be anxious to purchase expensive, antique furniture and design elements brought back from palaces and manor houses in Italy, France, and England.

The Vanderbilt's wealth enabled them to incorporate the latest innovations into their estate. They used electricity generated by a hydroelectric power plant built on the property. Other modern conveniences included a central heating system using coal-fired furnaces and indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water and flush toilets. The completed mansion contained 54 rooms, including 14 bathrooms, 10 guest bedrooms, and several rooms for male and female servants.

The couple typically spent time at the estate around Easter each year before heading north for the summer months. They returned in the fall, splitting their time between Hyde Park and New York City. Louise Vanderbilt delighted in entertaining at Hyde Park. Guests included nobility, and leaders in business, politics, and the arts. Visitors arrived by yacht at the estate's own river dock, by private railroad car at the estate's railroad station, or by chauffeur-driven automobiles. Aside from the 10 guest rooms in the mansion, the estate had guest bedrooms for bachelors located in the Pavilion, the house built for the Vanderbilts to live in as they oversaw the construction of the new mansion. The estate boasted two other guest houses as well.

Entertainment provided by the Vanderbilts included drives around the grounds and countryside as well as golf, tennis, horseback riding, and swimming at neighboring estates. After a day filled with activity, guests assembled for a formal dinner. The Vanderbilt dining table comfortably seated 30 guests. No matter the season, flowers selected by Louise from the greenhouses or gardens adorned the dining room table. Elaborate meals, prepared in the basement kitchen and sent up to the dining room on the dumbwaiter, consisted of several courses accompanied by different wines. An evening of bridge or a dance held in the 30-foot-by-50-foot drawing room followed the formal dinners. On Saturday night, dancing stopped precisely at midnight; Mrs. Vanderbilt did not approve of dancing on the Sabbath.

Frederick, known as a quiet and reserved man, avoided social occasions when he could. He preferred to slip away on walks to inspect his grounds. He avidly pursued his passion for horticulture and farming at Hyde Park. He often entered flowers in local shows as well as cattle in the Dutchess County fair. The farm provided the Hyde Park estate with all food necessities, including vegetables, beef, poultry, and dairy products. Usually 40 or more people tended to the farm and gardens, while 17 to 23 servants staffed the mansion. The farm and gardens operated year-round while a reduced crew oversaw the care of the mansion when the Vanderbilts did not reside there.

Upon his wife's death in 1926, Frederick Vanderbilt sold his other houses and returned to his Hyde Park estate to live out the last 12 years of his life. Since the couple had no children, they left their Hyde Park mansion to Louise's niece, Margaret Louise Van Alen. The wealthy Mrs. Van Alen tried for two years to sell the estate but found no buyers. Her neighbor in Hyde Park, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, suggested that she donate the estate to the National Park Service as a monument to the Gilded Age. Mrs. Van Alen agreed, and the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site opened to the public in 1940. The farm lands, which did not become part of the donation to the National Park Service, remain in private hands. The lavish mansion and its contents remain virtually unchanged from the time the Vanderbilts lived there.

Questions for Reading 2

1. Why would the Vanderbilts have wanted to hire a prestigious architectural firm to design their mansion?
2. How much money did the Vanderbilts spend on furnishings for their new mansion?
3. Why would the mansion have been considered modern at the time?
4. List some of the activities the Vanderbilts and their guests enjoyed. Do they differ from activities we enjoy today? If so, how?
5. Why did the Vanderbilts maintain such a large staff?

Reading 2 was adapted from Bronwyn Krog, "Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site" (Dutchess County, New York) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1979; the National Park Service visitor brochure for Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site; and John Foreman and Robbe Pierce Stimson, The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age: Architectural Aspirations, 1879-1901 *(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).*

Determining the Facts

Reading 3: The Vanderbilts as Philanthropists

Like many other Gilded Age "aristocrats," the Vanderbilts pursued their philanthropies as diligently as their pleasures. Beginning with Frederick Vanderbilt's grandfather, the family gave millions of dollars to charitable causes. In 1873, the Commodore donated a million dollars to establish Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Additional Vanderbilt gifts underwrote opera houses, art galleries, museums, hospitals, libraries, and educational institutions.

Frederick Vanderbilt, the first Vanderbilt to graduate from college, gave generously to Yale University, from which he graduated in 1878. He also contributed to the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) and the New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor. Louise Vanderbilt never tired of helping the Hyde Park community, particularly its young people. She established a reading room at St. James Chapel in Hyde Park and provided for the higher education of qualified young women. She proved instrumental in bringing a chapter of the Red Cross to town and in funding the District Nurse Service. Her principal charities outside Hyde Park were St. Anthony's Home for Girls and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. The Poughkeepsie *Sunday Courier*, the local newspaper at the time, often publicized the Vanderbilt's generous gifts to the community, from treating school children to an ice cream festival to buying a second hand motion picture machine so the residents of Hyde Park could view movies in the Town Hall.

The Vanderbilts played an important role in the economy of the community by hiring local residents, when possible, to work in the mansion and on the grounds and farm. When Frederick Vanderbilt died at the Hyde Park estate in 1938, 33 of the 57 recipients named in his will were employees of the estate. The amount each employee received depended on length of service and position held. Those who had worked on the estate for at least 10 years received the smallest bequest of $1,000. In 1938, $1,000 would purchase a nice new home in the town of Hyde Park. Other bequests ranged from $3,000 to $5,000, and from $10,000 to $25,000. The superintendent of the estate received the largest inheritance of the employees–$250,000 and one of the guest houses on the estate–because he had the responsibility of running the whole estate and keeping it productive and efficiently managed.

Born into an elite and privileged family, Frederick Vanderbilt maintained a good work ethic throughout his life and managed to acquire even greater wealth in his adulthood. He and his wife lived a lifestyle of almost unimaginable opulence and extravagance on their country estate in Hyde Park and elsewhere. Still, they became valued members of the local community by using their wealth and influence to help others.

Questions for Reading 3

1. What kinds of institutions did the Vanderbilts support through their philanthropy?
2. Although the Vanderbilts had no children, many of their charities focused on children. Why do you think that might have been?
3. Would you have wanted to work for the Vanderbilt family in Hyde Park? Why or why not?

Reading 3 was adapted from the National Park Service visitor brochure for Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site and John Foreman and Robbe Pierce Stimson, The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age: Architectural Aspirations, 1879-1901*(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).*

Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The Vanderbilt Mansion under construction, 1895.

Construction of the mansion proceeded at a rapid pace, beginning with the steel framework, then the brick infill, and finally the Indiana limestone. The exterior of the house was completed by August 1898.

National Park Service

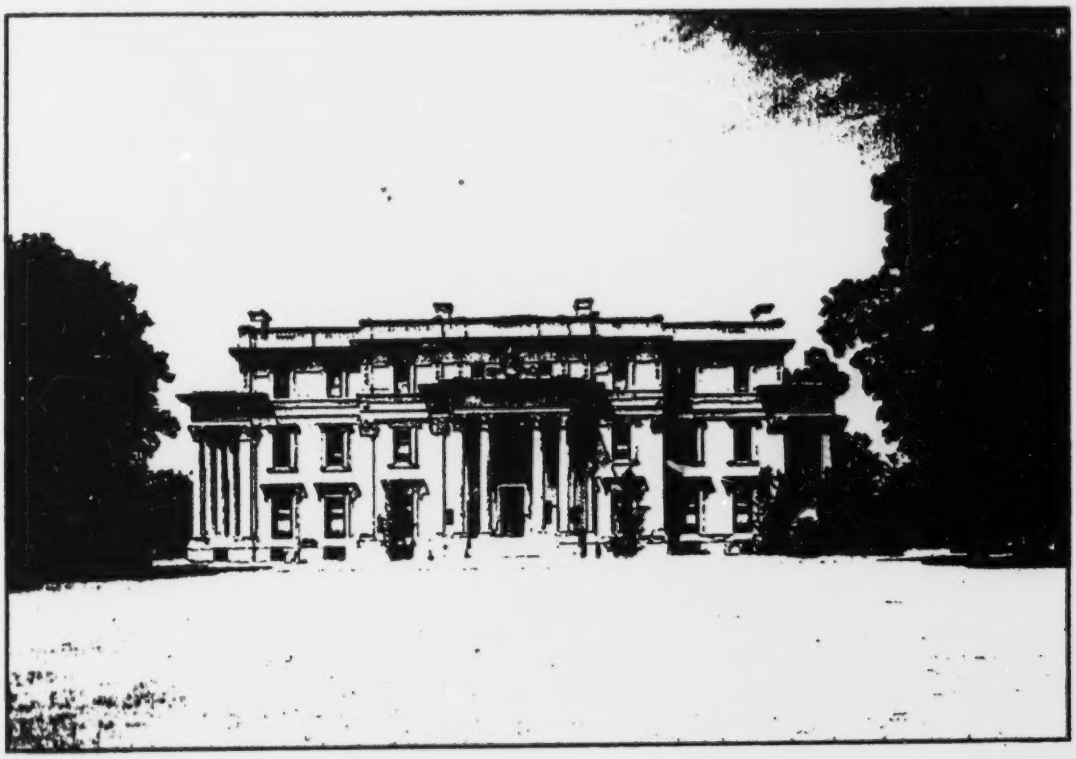
Questions for Photo 1

1. What can you learn about construction practices of the period from studying this photo?
2. What do you notice about the appearance of the craftsmen?
3. How does this photo help provide a sense of the mansion's scale?

Visual Evidence

Photo 2 : View of the Vanderbilt Mansion today.

The architectural style of the Vanderbilt mansion is known as Beaux-Arts. Typical features of Beaux-Arts buildings include a large and grandiose appearance; symmetrical facade (both sides of the central entrance are identical); exterior columns or pilasters (rectangular columns attached to a wall); wall surfaces embellished with floral patterns, garlands, medallions, or similar details; and a flat, low-pitched roof.



National Park Service

Visual Evidence

Photo 3: View of the Vanderbilt Mansion today.

National Park Service

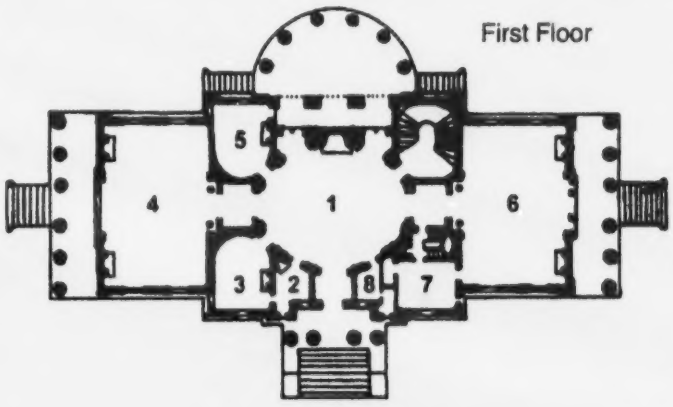
Questions for Photos 2 and 3

1. Identify some of the features which make this a Beaux-Arts style building.
2. Are there any houses or public buildings in your town that represent the Beaux-Arts style?
3. Why do you think wealthy families such as the Vanderbilts considered it important to construct such elaborate houses? Why was the Beaux-Arts style appropriate for these houses?

Visual Evidence

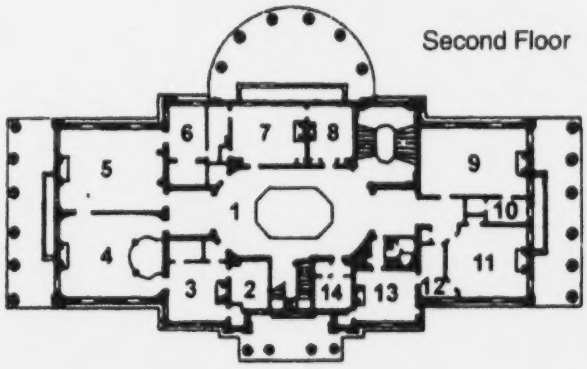
Drawing 1: Floor Plans of the Vanderbilt Mansion.

The Vanderbilts' guests entered the Reception Hall from the front driveway or from the lobby on the river side of the house. If they had come to see Mr. Vanderbilt on business, they were shown to the Study where he conducted estate business. Guests arriving for a party might enjoy a cocktail in the Gold Room before moving into the Dining Room. Formal entertainment, including dances and musical performances, took place in the Drawing Room. The Den acted as a family room as well as a place to have afternoon tea, write letters, or read.



1st Floor Key

1 Reception Hall
2 Study/Office
3 Den
4 Drawing Room
5 Gold Room
6 Dining Room
7 Butler's Pantry
8 Powder Room/ Coat Room



2nd Floor Key

1 Second Floor Hall
2 Louise Vanderbilt's Bathroom
3 Louise Vanderbilt's Boudoir
4 Louise Vanderbilt's Bedroom
5 Frederick Vanderbilt's Bedroom
6 Frederick Vanderbilt's Bathroom & Wardrobe
7-9 Guest Rooms
10 Bathroom
11 Guest Room
12 Bathroom
13 Guest Room
14 Linen Closet

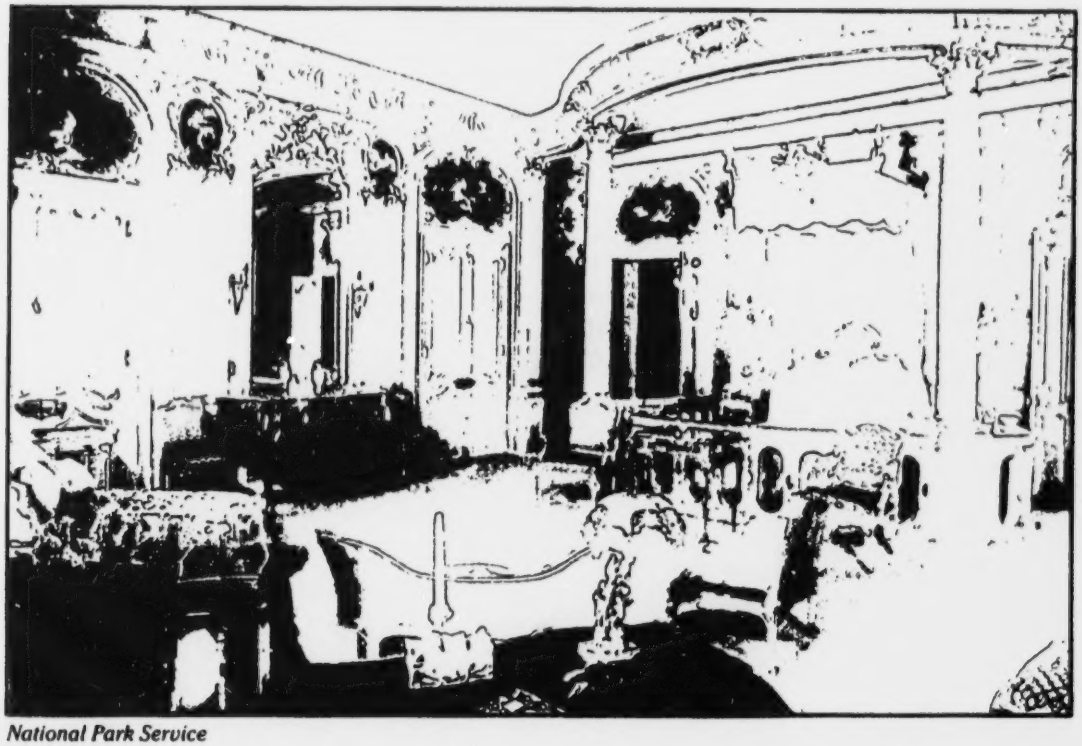
Questions for Drawing 1

1. Match the room numbers to the key to discover how the rooms were used. If you owned this house, how might you use the spaces provided?
2. Why is the kitchen not shown on these floor plans? (You may need to refer back to Reading 2. What other rooms might be located on the same level as the kitchen?

Visual Evidence

Photo 4: Louise Vanderbilt's bedroom.

This room is a reproduction of a French Queen's chamber from the Louis XV period. It features a ceremonial railing around the bed, silk wall coverings at the head of the bed, and French paintings. A connecting door leads to Louise Vanderbilt's boudoir (dressing room).



National Park Service

Questions for Photo 4

1. Refer to the floor plan to find the location of Louise Vanderbilt's bedroom.
2. How does this room reflect the Gilded Age?
3. Why might Louise Vanderbilt have wanted to sleep in a reproduction of a French Queen's bedroom?

Visual Evidence

Photo 5: The Vanderbilt dining room.

The Vanderbilts hosted many elaborate parties in their formal dining room. The large table could be expanded to seat 30 guests. When they ate alone, the Vanderbilts used the round table at the far end. The carved wood ceiling and the fireplaces came from European castles and palaces.

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Questions for Photo 5

1. Refer to the floor plan to find the location of the dining room.
2. What are your impressions of this room?
3. Why would the Vanderbilts have wanted such a large dining room?

Visual Evidence

Photo 6: The Pavilion.

The Vanderbilts stayed in this 16-room building during construction of their mansion. Built of stucco and painted wood, it became a guest house when the Vanderbilts moved into the completed mansion. After Louise Vanderbilt's death in 1926, the Pavilion remained closed until 1940 when it became an inn and a restaurant. For a time it also served as a visitor center and National Park Service office.

National Park Service

Questions for Photo 6

1. Locate the Pavilion on Map 2.
2. How do the design elements of this house compare to those of the mansion? List some important differences in design.

Setting the Stage

Explain to students that the Gilded Age refers to an era in the second half of the 19th century characterized by rapid industrial growth and enormous potential for economic gain. In this age before income tax and government regulation of business and industry, individuals such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt began to amass huge fortunes from business ventures including shipping, railroads, manufacturing, and banking. Cornelius "Commodore" Vanderbilt, at one time the richest man in America, founded the Vanderbilt family dynasty, which came to influence business, culture, architecture, and society in ways that still affect us today. The family fortune began when the Commodore started a ferry service between Staten Island and Manhattan in New York. He accumulated further wealth in railroading, including establishing the New York Central Railroad, which ran along the Hudson River.

The Commodore's heirs, particularly his grandchildren, redefined what it meant to be rich in America. Tremendous wealth enabled many of them to live a lavish lifestyle similar to European royalty. They pursued hobbies such as yachting and horse breeding and spent exorbitant sums on elaborate East Coast mansions filled with beautiful European furniture and art treasures. Today, several homes built by the Vanderbilts are open to the public and serve as a window into the lifestyle of the privileged few during the Gilded Age. One such home is that of Frederick and Louise Vanderbilt in Hyde Park, New York. At the time of its completion in 1898, it was considered the most palatial of more than 200 mansions along the Hudson River between New York City and Albany.

Putting It All Together

The following activities will help demonstrate to students the contributions, activities, and influences of the Vanderbilts and others who came to define the Gilded Age.

Activity 1: How the Other Half Lived

Divide the class into five groups and assign each group one of the following aspects of life during the Gilded Age: occupations, transportation, housing, leisure activities, and fashion. Concentrating on the last two decades of the 19th century, have each group research its category to discover the practices of both the wealthy and the average citizen. Ask each group to select a spokesperson to summarize the findings for the class. Finally, hold a general classroom discussion on the differences between the lifestyles of the wealthy and the average citizen during the Gilded Age.

Activity 2: Researching Personalities from the Gilded Age

Have students choose a wealthy individual or family, other than the Vanderbilts, from the Gilded Age. Ask them to conduct research on their life and legacy and prepare a short report. If possible, have students try to find out similar information about an important person in their own community or region during the same period. If any places associated with that person still exist in the community, arrange for students to visit and incorporate what they learn there in their report.

Activity 3: Philanthropy in the Local Community

Discuss with students the concept of philanthropy and have them list several examples. Encourage them to consider national, state, as well as local level efforts. Working in groups of three or four, have them select and visit a local organization–museum, hospital, university, library, or social club–that receives substantial philanthropic gifts. Ask each group to interview someone from the organization and try to find answers to the following questions: How have philanthropic donations benefited your organization? What philanthropists (individuals or businesses) have made major donations? Has their contribution been publicly recognized (e.g. through a plaque, name of a building, etc.)? Why and when did they or do they make their donations? Have the groups share their reports with the class and then discuss how their community as a whole benefits from philanthropic gifts.

How to Use Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plans

Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans bring real places where history happened directly into your classroom. By examining carefully selected written and visual documents, students experience the excitement of historical investigation as they learn the stories of these special places. The lesson plan format and content fit comfortably into standard units and curriculum topics in history, social studies, geography, and civics. Most student materials can be removed easily and duplicated. Although the format allows flexibility, it was designed to present the material as described below:

Getting Started

Begin the lesson by asking students to discuss possible answers to the question(s) found on the page titled *Getting Started*. To facilitate a whole class discussion, you may want to use the master copy provided to make an overhead transparency. The purpose of the exercise is to engage students' interest in the lesson's topic by raising questions that can be answered as they complete the lesson.

Setting the Stage

Present the information in *Setting the Stage* by reading it aloud, summarizing it, or photocopying it for students to read individually or in small groups. This historical background familiarizes students with the lesson's topic.

Locating the Site

Provide students with photocopies of the maps, captions, and questions in *Locating the Site*. Students may work together or individually to answer the questions. At least one map familiarizes students with the site's location within the country, state, and/or region. Extended captions may be included to provide students with information necessary to answer the questions.

Determining the Facts

Provide students with photocopies of the readings, charts, and/or other documents included in *Determining the Facts*. The questions for each selection help ensure that students have gathered the appropriate factual information.

Visual Evidence

Provide students with photocopies of the lesson's visual materials or use the master copies to make overhead transparencies. Students may work together or individually to answer the questions. Some lessons require studying two photos together. Extended captions may be included to provide students with important information.

Rather than serving merely as illustrations for the text, the images are documents that play an integral role in helping students achieve the lesson's objectives. To assist students in learning how to "read" visual materials, you may want to begin this section by having them complete the *Photograph Analysis Worksheet* for one or more of the photos. The worksheet is appropriate for analyzing both historical and modern photographs and will help students develop a valuable skill.

Putting It All Together

After students have answered the questions that accompany the maps, readings, and visuals, they should complete one or more of the *Putting It All Together* activities. These activities engage students in a variety of creative exercises, which help them understand the big picture by synthesizing the information they have learned and formulating conclusions. At least one activity leads students to look for places in their community that relate to the topic of the lesson. In this way, students learn to make connections between their community and the broader themes of American history they encounter in their studies.

Teaching with Historic Places (TwHP) is a program of the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as the nation's official list of cultural resources significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. TwHP is sponsored, in part, by the Cultural Resources Training Initiative and Parks as Classrooms programs of the National Park Service. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into classrooms across the country. For more information, contact Teaching with Historic Places, National Register of Historic Places, 1849 C Street, NW, Suite NC400, Washington, DC 20240, or visit the program's Web site at www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp.

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